IMARA
FELLOWSHIP
Investing in Africa's future policy leaders

IMARA FELLOWSHIP IMPACT REPORT 2024



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Markappeal

AYLF

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IMARA FELLOWSHIP REPORT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Imara Fellowship Documentary

The Imara Fellowship is a program focused on policy development, organised by Siasa Place (SP), the Africa Youth Leadership Forum (AYLF) and Mark Appeal Group (MA), with seed funding from the Ford Foundation. These organisations share a common goal of cultivating young leaders in Africa who are committed to integrity, social empathy, creativity, and public engagement. This initiative addresses the concerning trend that youth are often excluded from decision-making processes regarding issues that impact them and lack awareness of the roles played by county government leaders. Additionally, many young people do not know how to engage with the government on matters such as public finance, budgeting, and accountability. This highlights the necessity of training selected youth in public sector leadership roles within both national and county governments.

The Fellowship has played a crucial role in enhancing youth participation in governance and promoting social accountability in Kenya. This report assesses the results from the first three phases of the program, emphasising the accomplishments of the 90 Imara Fellows and County Accountability Champions (CACs) so far in areas such as policy advocacy, governance, and community involvement. The evaluation aimed to analyse resource utilisation, project impact, and identify gaps and opportunities for improvement within the program. The evaluation covered four counties: Kericho, Kisumu, Busia and Nairobi. It gathered data through analysis of previous project reports and evidence and 20 key informant interviews, engaging fellows, SACs and key stakeholders. The findings were analysedvthematically, leading to the insights shared in this report.

These funds in many cases are not properly utilized with the Controller of Budget noting that the counties had a total Ksh 159.94 billion pending bills as of 31st December 2022. Without civic education or the engagement with the duty bearers it becomes difficult for the people to hold their leaders to account yet the legal framework to allow for such already exists in the Constitution. Citizens are not only given an opportunity to ensure that their needs are taken care of during the budget process, they can also follow up to ensure that services are fully delivered and projects by the government are completed. In fact the constitution goes as far as providing processes of removal of the elected leaders whether it is impeaching a governor or recalling a member of county assembly.

Contribution of Fellows

Imara Fellows have made notable strides in policy advocacy, governance, and civic engagement. Through their work, three critical outputs were achieved.

1. Policy Formulation and Advocacy

Fellows have contributed to drafting and advocating for policies at both the county and national levels, some of which include:

- The Public Participation Bill for Busia County saw significant contributions from Imara Fellows, who helped with the drafting, making public participation a mandated element of the county's governance framework.
- The Creative Economy Support Bill 2024, developed by Migori County Senator Eddy Oketch in partnership with an Imara alumni fellow Marvin Orengo, seeks to enhance Kenya's neglected creative sector. This legislation is presently under consideration in the Senate.
- Gender Policy Advocacy: Wangari Kariuki has contributed to national and international policy engagements on gender equity, including the drafting of Kenya's position for the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).
- Fellows have been involved in developing self role and institutional policies to increase public sector service delivery.
- The positive rapport established between the leadership program of Imara Africa and the Kericho Youth Network led the County Assembly of Kericho to trustingly share the proposed 'Youth Economic Empowerment' bill with the Imara fellows. This allowed the fellows to provide feedback and represent the youth's perspective on the bill prior to its presentation for approval in the Assembly.

2. Developing Policy Recommendations

- Kericho County - The project identified policy issues in technical training institutions, including human resource and governance, and after engaging stakeholders like the government, youth, and instructors, the report was shared with the County Assembly and Executive, leading to its use as evidence to persuade the Kericho Public Service Board to hire more instructors during the 2019/2020 financial year.
- Kisumu County - The project established partnerships with youth-led startups and organisations like Jiwo Paro and Kondele Social Justice Centre, which helped launch collaborative projects such as a youth baraza; through engagements with the county, the project identified emerging youth issues like prostitution, pornography production, and betting addiction, all linked to rising HIV/AIDS infections and financial struggles, and entrepreneurial training was implemented as a result.
- Busia County - Despite political challenges and slow progress, consistent follow-up with the Busia Steering Committee enabled the project to successfully push for the tabling of a youth internship policy motion in the County Assembly on 6th August 2019.

3. Empowered Civic Leadership

Fellows have showcased their leadership in their respective fields by enhancing service delivery and taking part in institutional policy reforms. They have also been actively involved in community barazas, enabling community members to champion their rights in local governance affairs.

4. Increased Youth Participation in Governance

Fellows helped increase youth engagement in county forums, leading to the presentation of memoranda and petitions for infrastructure projects in healthcare and education. For example, fellows contributed to social audits that enabled easy follow up on stalled projects in counties.

5. Holding the Government to Account

In Kericho County, a fellow took legal action against the government for failing to engage the public in the selection of county executive members. Additionally, he sought to participate in a case as an interested party, opposing the appointment process for county officials, which he argued discriminated against the youth and individuals with disabilities.

Contribution of County Accountability Champions

CACs were essential in bridging the gap between community members and county officials by organising public forums and leading social accountability efforts. Notable accomplishments include:

1. Social Audits of Public Projects

CACs led efforts to hold county governments accountable for stalled and mismanaged projects. Examples include:

Kudho ECDE - CACs in Kisumu found that Kudho ECDE had been funded for three fiscal years but had not made notable advancements in construction. They called for accountability from the county government, which resulted in greater scrutiny and pressure. This ultimately led to the proper completion of the project and the responsible utilisation of public funds.

Obunga Dispensary - CACs in Kisumu stopped the county government from acquiring land for Obunga Hospital because there was insufficient community engagement. They presented a memorandum advocating for local involvement in the decision-making process. Consequently, the site for Nyalenda Hospital was selected according to the needs and preferences of the community.

CACs conducted a social audit of Nyalenda Hospital in Kisumu, evaluating its infrastructure and service delivery, and subsequently submitted an audit report to the county government. This led to renovations at Nyalenda Hospital, enhancing the overall quality of services and establishing a new functional maternity wing for maternal healthcare.

2. Community Mobilization for Accountability

CACs organised collective actions and civic education initiatives, which increased citizen participation in governance and led to notable outcomes:

- Youth in Busia presented a memorandum demanding for youth inclusion in the composition of the board in Busia County vocational training Bill 2020.
- Youth in Kericho petitioned the county assembly to allocate a budget for youth programs in the 2021/2022 financial year. Through the petition submitted by youth in Kericho, youth programs were allocated thirty million (Ksh30,000,000) from zero (Ksh 0) budget.

What is Working

1. The structure of Imara Fellowship is ideal for the intention it is meant for. From the hybrid learning sessions, the social audits and public participation exposures.
2. The courses offered during the one year program are perfect for the program as supported by the fellows, especially Making Governments Work in Hard Places.
3. Fellows are effectively influencing policy creation and implementation across the country.
4. Both fellows and CACs are successfully increasing public awareness and engagement, leading to members of the community presenting proposals and memoranda in public forums, directly influencing county budgets.
5. Fellows and CACs are using digital platforms, including social media, to amplify their advocacy.
6. CACs are conducting social audits that are improving service delivery and accountability in sectors like healthcare and education, ensuring the completion of essential public projects such as Kudho ECDE and Obunga Dispensary.
7. The program is noting improved youth confidence and attitudes toward governance, with more youth presenting themselves to serve their communities.
8. The program has enabled participants to compete for opportunities and excel globally.

What is not Working

1. 1. The increased visibility and influence of Imara Fellows and CACs sometimes led to tensions with local officials, particularly when accountability effort exposed governance inefficiencies.
2. A lack of clear role delineation among program partners (Siasa Place, ALYF, and Mark Appeal Group) affected program execution, especially the alumni transition.
3. The absence of a clear monitoring framework with Key Performance Indicators hindered the program's ability to measure long-term impacts.
4. The program did not fully include marginalised groups such as Persons With Disabilities (PWDs) and other minority communities during recruitment.
5. The alumni association is weak with no clear structure for engagement. This has led to many fellows abandoning their accountability roles to focus on other things.
6. Financial support for fellows was limited and this affected their participation in all activities.

Recommendations

1. Agree on a reasonable consistent stipend for fellows that can cater for internet and other minor expenditures throughout the year.
2. Introduce additional courses that can continue to strengthen the capacity of fellows to undertake their roles during and after the fellowship.
3. Invest in the Imara Fellowship Alumni Network to maintain momentum and continue empowering young leaders. The findings indicate a weak link in the continuity of the accountability work after the fellowship.
4. Develop a clear guideline on how the alumni fellows should be continually engaged and supported after the fellowship.
5. Develop clear project success indicators for easy and continuous monitoring of progress.
6. Increase the media visibility of the program through fellow stories, milestones and key partnerships. And in doing this, identify something that Imara can be known for.
7. Continue supporting public forums at the ward level in the previous target counties, as they

have proven effective in building community-led accountability movements.
8. Increase efforts to include more women, PWDs, and minority groups in governance and public participation activities.
9. Expand digital advocacy efforts to increase transparency and hold county officials accountable through interactive online engagement.
10. Make certain that details regarding the fellowship are easily accessible on the internet by stabilising both the website's functionality and its content.
11. Create Sector-Specific Working Groups for Career Development of the fellows. This will provide targeted sessions and enhance career advancement through specialised training.
12. Provide Ongoing Mentorship and Institutional Connections with public policy organisations to help fellows navigate post-fellowship challenges and sustain their advocacy efforts.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Imara Fellowship was conceived with the long-term goal of fostering responsive governance in Kenya by creating a community of young policy and civic leaders. The program's core intention is to equip these leaders with the necessary skills to promote democracy, transparency, and accountability, thereby transforming them into social accountability champions who can hold the government accountable at both community and national levels.

1.1 Structure and Intentions

The fellowship was designed to offer a blend of practical and theoretical training through workshops, online courses, and community engagement activities. The program structure focused on key areas such as policy formulation, public finance, community organising, and governance, aiming to build a strong foundation for the fellows' leadership journeys. During the fellowship, there are both formal training sessions, such as the five-day physical academy, and online courses like "Making Governments Work in Hard Places" by Princeton University and "Community Engagement" by the University of Michigan.

The intention was clear: to bridge the gap between young leaders and government institutions by equipping them with the tools needed for effective governance. Fellows were encouraged to engage with local communities, promote transparency in governance, and contribute to policy advocacy in their respective counties.

1.2 Implementation and Outcomes

The implementation of the fellowship involved a range of activities that spanned training, mentorship, social audits, and public participation forums.

1. Academy Training: The five-day physical training laid the groundwork for fellows by providing comprehensive knowledge in areas such as leadership mapping, Kenya's devolution process, policy design, and social accountability.
2. Online Courses: Fellows also completed two online courses, Making Governments Work in Hard Places by Princeton University and Community Engagement by the University of Michigan, further strengthening their knowledge of governance.

3. Social Audits and Community Engagement: The program facilitated socialaudits in key sectors such as healthcare and water management, where fellows identified governance gaps, organised community barazas, and collaborated with county officials to address inefficiencies.

The fellowship's outcomes have been impactful. Fellows initiated significant policy contributions, such as drafting the Public Participation Bill in Busia County and advocating for gender and economic policies at national and international forums. Moreover, the program's emphasis on digital advocacy helped increase youth participation in governance, leading to stronger accountability in target counties.

1.3 Changes and Program Evolution

Throughout its implementation, the program underwent several adjustments to enhance its effectiveness. Initially, the fellowship had planned to conduct public lectures in Nairobi, but this approach shifted to holding community barazas in target counties. This change stemmed from the need for more localised engagement, allowing fellows to interact directly with communities and better address the issues at hand. The shift from intellectual debates to community dialogues fostered deeper connections between Imara Fellows and their communities.

Additionally, the inclusion of local informants (County Accountability Champions), rather than purely national intellectuals, as key participants in these dialogues further strengthened the relevance of the discussions. These changes have had a lasting effect on the program, ensuring that the Imara Fellowship remains responsive to the needs of the communities it serves, and that it continues to empower youth to lead with a grounded understanding of local governance challenges. County Accountability Champions (CACs) played a vital role in connecting communities with county officials by organising public forums and leading social accountability initiatives. They conducted social audits of projects like Kudho ECDE and Obunga Dispensary in Kisumu, addressing mismanagement and ensuring proper use of funds. Their efforts resulted in community-led decision-making for Nyalenda Hospital, leading to infrastructure improvements, including a new maternity wing and enhanced service delivery among others.

2. METHODOLOGY

The data for this report was collected through purposive sampling, which targeted alumni who had demonstrated significant progress in their leadership roles and community projects. The methodology focused on qualitative approaches, utilising semi-structured interviews with fellows, county accountability champions, and other key stakeholders. This allowed for in-depth exploration of the fellowship's impact on individual leadership development, community engagement, and policy work. The use of one-on-one interviews provided rich narratives that captured both the successes and challenges experienced by the fellows during and after their time in the fellowship.

3. KEY FINDINGS

3.1. Successes

3.1.1. Structure and Courses Offered

The Imara Fellowship's structured training programs have been central to the development of the fellows' skills and capacities. A key highlight of the program was the introduction of practical online courses like "Making Government Work in Hard Places," a course offered by Princeton University and the policy training facilitated by KIPPRA which were instrumental in shaping their approaches to leadership and governance.

3.1.1.1 Making Government Work in Hard Places

This course significantly impacted the fellows by providing them with a new perspective on governance in challenging environments. It equipped them with the tools and insights needed to influence policy, engage with government leaders, and promote accountability in their respective counties. The courses also served as a global benchmark, highlighting the fact that many of the governance challenges faced are a global phenomenon rather than a preserve of contexts.

- Emmie Adeche (Cohort 1) found this training enlightening. She explained how the "problem tree" exercise, part of the course, changed her approach to addressing community challenges. Emmie, who worked on wash (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) interventions in her community, noted that prior to the fellowship, she often addressed the symptoms of problems rather than their root causes. For instance, while tackling the issue of jiggers in the community, the training taught her to look beyond the immediate problem and investigate deeper and uncover the systemic issues. Emmie described the exercise as "an eye-opener", where she learned that solving surface-level issues often requires addressing much deeper, structural problems . This approach became central to her work, not only in her community interventions but also in her ongoing efforts as a human rights defender, where she now tackles gender-based violence and advocates for systemic change from the "roots".

- Wangari Kariuki (Cohort 2) explained that this course came at a time when she was shifting her focus from student leadership to policy advocacy. She emphasised that the course helped her gain practical skills in community engagement and working with county governments. Specifically, Wangari participated in community barazas (forums) in Kisumu, where she engaged with members of the community and members of the County Assembly. Her work focused on improving public participation and accountability. She reflected that "Making Government Work in Hard Places" enabled her to understand how to approach government leaders and mobilise communities to hold their leaders accountable for service delivery .

- Marvin Orengo (Cohort 3) also highlighted the significance of this course in shaping his approach to leadership and governance. He pointed out that the course exposed him to case studies from different countries that had faced significant governance challenges. Marvin emphasised how this learning experience was transformative, stating: "I was able to learn how societies with leadership challenges used different techniques to improve service delivery."

This exposure gave him the confidence to implement similar approaches in Busia county, particularly in organising youth engagement and monitoring service delivery at local hospitals.

- Yvonne Ngichwa (Cohort 1) found the course relevant given her background in gender and development studies. Yvonne appreciated how the course provided real-world applications for the theoretical knowledge she had acquired during her undergraduate studies. She stated that the course helped her navigate Kenya's complex political landscape in terms of gender inclusivity in leadership and decision-making . After completing the course, Yvonne confidently sought opportunities to intern with Homabay County Government, applying the leadership and governance skills she gained. Although she faced challenges in her role due to systemic corruption and inefficiencies, she felt empowered by the fellowship to stand firm in her advocacy for transparency and accountability.

- Emily Nyawira (Cohort 3) emphasised how the course prepared her to engage with communities in hardship areas. She noted that "Making Government Work in Hard Places" underscored the importance of first understanding a community's needs before proposing any policy changes. Emily applied this approach in her work, conducting feasibility studies and pilot projects to ensure that her interventions were community-driven. She learned that successful governance requires deep community engagement and that leaders must be responsive to the needs of the people they serve .

3.1.1.2 Policy Training with KIPPRA

Another significant component of the fellowship was the policy course offered in collaboration with the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis (KIPPRA). This course provided fellows with insights into policy formulation, governance, and public administration. It was particularly valuable for fellows working directly with government institutions and those interested in influencing policy at the national and county levels.

- Erick Koech (Cohort 2) benefitted from the policy drafting course facilitated by KIPPRA. Erick, who is passionate about law and governance, emphasised how the course deepened his understanding of policy-making from drafting to implementation. He stated: "The training on policy drafting facilitated by KIPPRA really stood out for me. I learned the entire process from the initial stages of policy formulation to monitoring and evaluation."

3.1.2 Leadership Development and Policy Engagement

The Imara Fellowship has played a vital role in shaping the leadership abilities of its participants, many of whom have assumed significant positions within their communities and fields. This program highlighted the significance of leadership in areas such as public policy, governance, and social accountability, enabling fellows to develop the confidence and skills necessary for meaningful engagement with government and community leaders.

- Dr. Edwin Rono (Cohort 1)

Dr. Edwin Rono joined the Imara Fellowship in 2018, motivated by his desire to engage more deeply with public policy alongside his medical career. At the time, he was a medical intern, but

his leadership development within the fellowship laid the groundwork for his subsequent rise to Senior Medical Officer and Acting Medical Director at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital. Dr. Rono reflected on his journey, stating that his expectations for the fellowship were met and exceeded. He joined with the aim of understanding how public policies are formulated and how citizens can contribute to policy discourse. He explained: "The lessons I gained during that time served me then and are still serving me today." His experience with the fellowship enabled him to participate in policy development within his institution, identifying gaps in existing policies and contributing to the creation of new frameworks. "I have contributed to public policy even within this institution by developing several policies, some of which were improvements to existing ones," Dr. Rono remarked, highlighting how the fellowship equipped him to engage with policy issues at multiple levels . His leadership development extended beyond professional growth, as the fellowship helped him refine his engagement in public discourse. He noted that before the program, his involvement in public affairs was less diplomatic. However, through the fellowship, he learned to navigate discussions more purposefully, leading to more productive and effective engagements .

- Wangari Kariuki (Cohort 2)

Wangari Kariuki's leadership journey is another testament to the transformative power of the Imara Fellowship. With a background in agribusiness and a passion for policy advocacy, Wangari joined the fellowship to learn how to advocate for youth involvement in the agricultural sector. As a former student leader, she had decided to shift from political leadership to policy advocacy, focusing on empowering young people in agriculture. During the fellowship, Wangari participated in community barazas in Kisumu, engaging with community members and local government leaders to promote public participation and accountability. She noted: "I participated in two community barazas where we engaged with community members on the role of members of the County Assembly and how they can hold their leaders accountable."These experiences were critical in shaping her understanding of leadership and governance . After completing the fellowship, Wangari's leadership journey expanded to the international stage. She had the opportunity to travel to Canada for an international policy engagement focused on the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). There, she advocated for policies at the global level before returning to Kenya to engage with the Ministry of Gender. She played a key role in drafting the country's position paper on CSW, leveraging the skills and confidence she gained through the fellowship. "Based on the experience I had in the fellowship, I think it enhanced my skills in advocating at a national and international level," she explained . Her continued leadership in gender policy advocacy has been a direct outcome of her time in the Imara Fellowship.

- Dr. Winrose Kirui (Cohort 1)

Dr. Winrose Kirui joined the Imara Fellowship with a clear goal: to take on leadership roles within the healthcare system in Kericho County, where she was working as a medical officer. Specialising in obstetrics and gynaecology, she was interested in improving service delivery in healthcare facilities and contributing to leadership in the health sector. Winrose reflected on her motivations for joining the fellowship, stating: "I wanted to do a fellowship or program that dealt with leadership and service delivery, and I wanted to join leadership positions at the county hospital." Although she has not yet assumed a senior leadership position due to her ongoing studies, the fellowship has helped her build the confidence to take on junior leadership roles, such as leading journal

clubs within her institution . The fellowship also introduced Winrose to the concept of public participation, an area she had not previously explored. She now actively participates in public forums in Kericho, where she engages with citizens and county officials on healthcare-related policy issues. "I didn't know what public participation entailed before the fellowship, but now I understand how important it is to have your voice heard in policy discussions," she remarked. The leadership skills she developed during the fellowship continue to influence her work in healthcare and public policy.

- Marvin Orengo (Cohort 3)

The fellowship equipped Marvin with the confidence and skills to engage with leaders in the policy space. A recent highlight of his policy work was his meeting with Hon. Eddy Oketch, the Senator of Migori County, to collaborate on the Creative Economy Support Bill 2024. This bill aims to promote Kenya's underfunded creative industry. Marvin credited the fellowship for providing him with the tools to navigate these high-level policy discussions. "The fellowship equipped me with the communication skills needed to engage with leaders on important issues," Marvin explained, noting that the opportunity to work on such a bill was a direct outcome of his exposure during the fellowship.

- Philip Idewa (Cohort 2)

Philip Idewa was involved in drafting the Public Participation Bill for Busia County, ensuring that the spirit of public participation was fully embraced by the county. "We really helped them come up with the Public Participation Bill," he stated, adding that the process involved collaboration with other fellows and local government officials. Philip was proud of the impact this work had, noting that Busia County is now considered one of the counties that has a legal framework on public participation and has fully embraced public participation in all its governance structures .

3.1.3. Involvement in Governance and County Accountability

The participants of the Imara Fellowship have been engaged in projects focused on governance and accountability within their counties, where they have achieved significant progress in tackling local challenges. Their efforts include conducting social audits, promoting public participation initiatives, and overseeing health services to improve transparency and promote the effective utilisation of public resources.

- Steve Wanda (Cohort 3)

Steve Wanda has been a key player in holding the Kisumu County government accountable for the use of public funds in healthcare and education projects as in the cases of Obunga Hospital and Kudho Early Childhood Development Education (ECDE) centre. At Obunga Hospital, Steve discovered that the county government intended to purchase land for the hospital without proper community involvement. He and his team intervened, halting the land acquisition process until local residents could participate in the decision. "We submitted a memorandum to the county government, stopping the purchase of land until the community was involved," Steve explained. After this intervention, the land for Nyalenda Hospital was eventually chosen based on the needs and preferences of the community and the hospital was built in a location that best served its residents.



A photo taken during the handing over of land for the construction of Obunga Dispensary



Obunga Dispensary now, after completion.

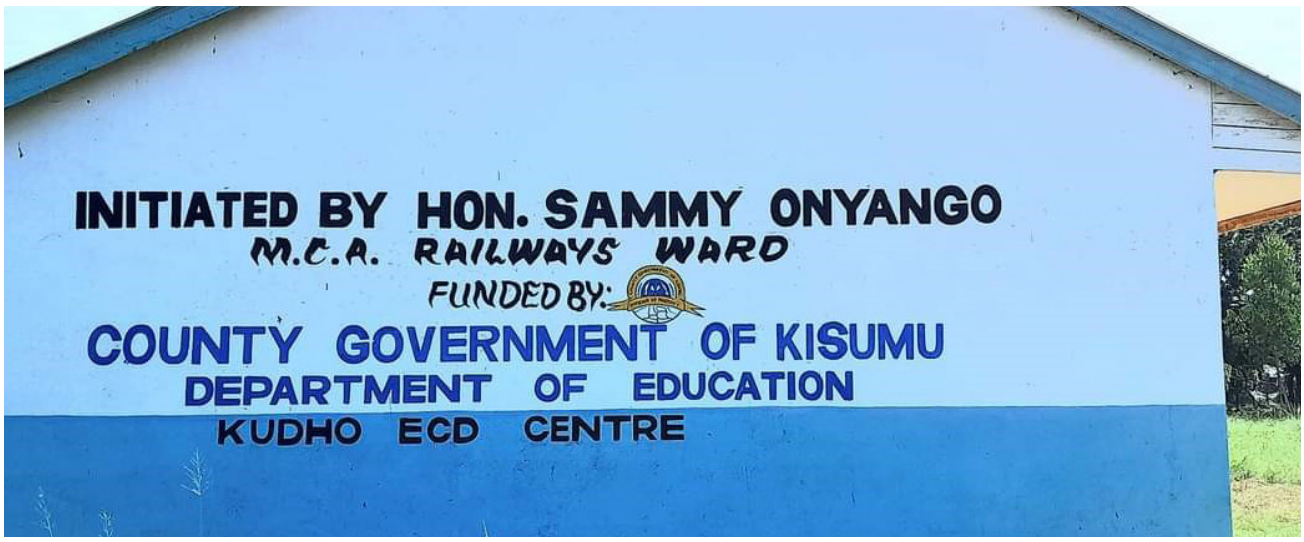
Regarding Kudho ECDE, Steve uncovered that the project had received funding allocations over three fiscal years without tangible progress being made on the construction of the school. "The project received allocations for three financial years, but it was never completed," Steve said. Steve and other fellows demanded accountability from the county government, pushing for the project to be completed and for the proper utilisation of public funds. The exposure of these issues led to heightened scrutiny and increased pressure on the county to ensure the proper completion of Kudho ECDE .



A photo taken during the handing over of land for the construction of Obunga Dispensary



After the project was picked up



Kudho ECDE after completion

- Emmanuel Opiyo (Cohort 2)

Emmanuel Opiyo was instrumental in leading a social audit of Kisumu County's healthcare facilities, with a particular focus on Nyalenda Hospital. The audit was part of a broader effort to improve health service delivery in Kisumu, where Emmanuel and his team evaluated the functionality and infrastructure of local health facilities. "We developed an audit report for four health facilities, including Nyalenda, and presented it to the County Government," he said. Emmanuel's audit resulted in tangible changes at Nyalenda Hospital, including renovations and better service delivery, particularly in maternal healthcare. He continues to chair a community health volunteer group in the area, ensuring that local citizens have a voice in how healthcare services are delivered. Emmanuel will also be vying for the position of a Member of the County Assembly (MCA) in the 2027 general elections.

- John Wabwire (Cohort 1)

John Wabwire's focus has been on water and health accountability in Busia County, where he has led community engagement initiatives to improve service delivery in these sectors. He explained that one of the major challenges in Busia was the lack of transparency in project implementation, particularly in the water sector. "We realised that water projects were being done without involving the community in public participation, and many were mismanaged," John noted . John and his team worked closely with local leaders to halt mismanaged projects and ensure that community members were involved in decision-making.

3.1.4 International Impact and Opportunities for Further Studies

- The Imara Fellowship experience sparked Gabriel Dinda's interest in studying the impact of youth climate activists on the development and execution of climate adaptation policies in Kenya for his Phd at the University of Nairobi. This research proposal earned him a scholarship for a second PhD at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, funded by the Global Centre for Adaptation.
- Wangari Kariuki had the opportunity to travel to Canada for an international policy training focused on the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) after which she worked with the Ministry of Gender in drafting the country's position paper on CSW.
- Shadrack Osero from cohort one used his participation in the Imara Fellowship as an important bargaining chip when seeking an opportunity for an international master's program. Because of the fellowship, he was admitted to the University of Pennsylvania, where he completed a double master's in international affairs and business analytics. He is currently working as a machine learning engineer, assisting institutions with policy analysis and decision-making.
- Mathew Ndolo, a cohort one fellow, was able to secure an opportunity to continue his training from the Imara Fellowship on policy at the University of California, Berkeley, where he is currently pursuing a master's in public policy. He states that the Imara Fellowship played an important role in helping him obtain this opportunity.
- Ivy Wandia used the exposure from the Imara Fellowship to engage with policy and gender issues as part of her experience in this field to apply for a master's scholarship in Switzerland. She received an opportunity at The Graduate Institute, Geneva, to study international affairs and global security, which has opened many career doors for her.

- After completing the Imara Fellowship in the second cohort, Oliver Barasa applied for a master's scholarship in public health with a research focus on policy in public health. Because of the fellowship, he was able to secure a scholarship from the Federal Republic of Russia and is currently admitted to I.M. Sechenov First Moscow State Medical University (Sechenov University), where he is pursuing a master's in epidemiology and policy in public health. He has also served as the national vice chair for The Kenya National Union of Medical Laboratory Officers since 2022.

3.1.5 Personal Initiatives related to Imara Fellowship

- Brian Fidel is now a Tuberculosis (TB) advocate in Kericho, partnering with the Stop TB Initiative and championing adequate, timely care for those affected.





- Emmanuel Opiyo is the founder of Dero Arts, a Community Based Organization that mentors young artists from Nyanza and Western regions to use their arts in engaging in critical conversations like governance, social change and most importantly, earn a living from it. Dero Arts has a showroom at Mama Grace Onyango Social Centre and Kenya Museums Offices in Kisumu.



- John Wabwire is the founder of Bunyala Youth Agri Climate Action Impact Solutions that advocates for youth involvement in climate adaptation and advocating for better community health systems and services for the residents of Bunyala Sub-County.
- Grace Jackline Oyoo is currently partnering different stakeholders in Kisumu to train the community members on social accountability, policy awareness and the role of the community in holding power to account. She is also currently a clerk of the Youth Model Assembly in Kisumu which is a mirror of the Kenyan County Assembly, a lobbying and advocacy platform where young people debate about social issues and come up with possible solutions.
- Gabriel Dinda is currently collaborating with the Stockholm Environmental Institute and Global Center on Adaptation on initiatives focused on engaging youth in climate adaptation. He is both a trainer and researcher for these initiatives.



3.2. Challenges Faced

- Although the Imara Fellowship has achieved numerous successes, it has faced various challenges that have limited its overall effectiveness. According to the fellows, these obstacles include logistical difficulties as well as more widespread systemic issues.

3.2.1. COVID-19 Disruption

The global pandemic severely disrupted the fellowship's activities, particularly for the third cohort. Many fellows reported that COVID-19 restrictions limited their ability to engage with their communities and implement the projects they had planned. For instance, Brian Fidel and his peers in Kericho and the entire cohort two as stressed by Phillip Idewa were unable to hold public forums or meet with government officials during the height of the pandemic. This not only slowed down their advocacy work but also limited their opportunities for hands-on experience in policy work.

3.2.2. Limited Resources for Fellows

A recurring challenge mentioned by fellows was the lack of financial resources to support their work. While the fellowship provided some level of funding, many fellows found that it was not enough to cover the costs of transportation, accommodation, and community engagement activities. Philip Idewa reported that organising public forums in remote areas of Busia was often

difficult due to limited financial resources. Steve Wanda from Kisumu also mentioned this as a challenge that hindered public participation forums. Edwin Rono also talked about lack of support for the internet for online training. This made it challenging to ensure broad-based community participation in governance projects.

3.2.3. Inconsistent Support from Local Governments

Another significant challenge was the inconsistent support from local government officials. While some fellows reported positive engagements, others found it difficult to secure the cooperation of local leaders. Steve Wanda mentioned that some politicians were reluctant to support accountability initiatives, especially when these initiatives involved scrutinising the use of public resources. This resistance from local authorities made it harder for fellows to achieve their objectives.

3.2.4. Safety Concerns in Conducting Accountability Work

Fellows Steve Wanda mentioned concerns about safety during their accountability work. When holding public officials accountable and conducting social audits, some fellows felt they were viewed as adversaries, leading to concerns about being blacklisted or facing risks while conducting oversight on public projects.

3.2.5. Limited Alumni Engagement and Post-Fellowship Support

Fellows expressed a need for more structured support and engagement after the fellowship ended. Emmanuel Opiyo noted that the alumni program could be strengthened to provide more follow-up and resources to continue the work initiated during the fellowship. Sustaining the momentum of their projects without ongoing support was seen as a challenge by several fellows including Emmie Adeche, Brian Fidel, John Wabwire and literally every fellow that was interviewed.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

To ensure the sustainability of the Imara Fellowship and to build on its successes, the following recommendations were proposed by fellows:

4.1. Enhance Financial and Logistical Support

Fellows like Steve Wanda highlighted the need for more resources to sustain their social accountability work. For future cohorts, the fellowship should allocate more resources to cover the logistical needs of the fellows, like transportation and community engagement activities and an internet stipend. This would allow the fellows to focus more on their advocacy work and less on the financial challenges of running community projects.

4.2. Strengthen Alumni Networks

Several fellows, including Emmanuel Opiyo, recommended enhancing the alumni program. They suggested creating more structured support and opportunities for alumni to stay engaged after the fellowship ends. Jackline Oyoo stressed that by providing continued mentorship, resources, and platforms for collaboration, alumni would be better equipped to maintain the momentum of their work and projects post-fellowship . A more formalised alumni network would allow former fellows to collaborate more effectively and share resources. This network could also serve as a mentorship platform for new fellows, helping to bridge the gap between cohorts and ensure continuity in the fellowship's impact.

4.3. Increase Collaboration with Government and Grassroot Organizations

Fellows recommended building stronger partnerships with other grassroots organisations and stakeholders to secure continuous funding and support for their initiatives, even after the fellowship's formal backing ends . To ensure that the fellows' projects are supported at the local level, the fellowship should also work to establish stronger partnerships with county governments. This could involve setting up formal agreements with local authorities to provide more consistent support for the fellows' initiatives.

4.4. Extend the Program Duration for Deeper Exploration of Governance Issues

Marvin Orengo highlighted the importance of lengthening the fellowship's timeframe. He argued that an extended program would enable fellows to explore governance and policy matters more thoroughly and achieve greater outcomes throughout the fellowship year. Additionally, Wangari Kariuki proposed broadening the fellowship's scope to incorporate participants from multiple counties in Kenya, thereby enriching the range of viewpoints and tackling governance challenges in diverse cultural and regional settings.

4.5. Create Sector-Specific Working Groups for Career Development

Wangari Kariuki proposed the establishment of working groups focused on specific sectors, designed to match the participants' career trajectories. Wangari emphasised that these groups could facilitate career advancement by offering specialised sessions that correspond with the fellows' interests. "For example, if my focus is on agribusiness and entrepreneurship, we could

organise sessions or working groups specifically for that area, ensuring they align with the participants' career paths," she stated.

4.6. Provide Ongoing Mentorship and Institutional Connections

Emmie Adeche highlighted the crucial role of ongoing mentorship following the fellowship to strengthen its lasting effects. She proposed establishing systems to link fellows with public policy organisations and mentors for continuous support. "The training we received was exceptional, but many of us might find it challenging to manage the intricacies of the field without further mentorship. It's essential to have connections to organisations or individuals who can assist us after the Fellowship," Emily noted.

5. A WORD FROM THE DIRECTORS

5.1. Lone Felix, Co-Founder, Mark Appeal

Since its inception, the Imara Fellowship has transformed young leaders, and it has been a privilege for Mark Appeal to contribute to its growth and nationwide impact. At Mark Appeal, we firmly believe in the potential of young Africans to lead the next generation of public service and governance, and the Imara Fellowship exemplifies this belief.

The word "Imara," which means "firm" or "solid" in Swahili, reflects the fellowship's core principles: building a strong foundation for leadership and community action. Launched in 2017, the program was created in response to the recognition that many young people lacked exposure, resources, and a clear understanding of what it means to lead in public spaces. Imara addresses this gap by providing a platform for young leaders to receive structured training, learn organisational skills, and build coalitions for change.

We partnered with Siasa Place and the African Youth Leadership Forum(AYLF) to design a program focused on governance, policy, and community organising principles. Together, we developed a model that not only teaches theory but also places fellows in real-world situations where they can apply their skills and learn from one another.

Our role as partners is to support the program's design and ensure it adapts to the evolving needs of the fellows and their communities. We collaborate closely with our partners to address critical governance issues, empowering young leaders to challenge the status quo and drive meaningful change in their communities.

Mark Appeal has been instrumental in the program's success, particularly in branding and positioning the fellows. We work to elevate their profiles, helping them showcase their important work and connect with broader opportunities in governance and policy. This exposure has directly benefited many of our fellows, some of whom have secured board appointments in county governments, scholarships for further studies in policy, and leadership roles in civil society organisations.

Our vision for the Imara Fellowship remains ambitious. We aim to transition it into an established leadership institution that provides continuous learning and leadership development beyond the one-year program. We aspire for Imara to become a long-term fixture in leadership development, offering young leaders a structured path from their communities to national and even continental leadership roles.

Moreover, we believe the fellowship's impact should extend beyond Kenya. With the success of some of our fellows in Rwanda and other parts of East Africa, we aim to expand the program's reach and foster leadership and governance across the continent.

It has been a privilege to be part of this journey, and I look forward to seeing how the fellowship

continues to shape the next generation of African leaders.

Lone Felix
Co-Founder, Mark Appeal

5.2. Nerima Wako, Executive Director, Siasa Place

Over the years, Siasa Place has been committed to fostering a new generation of civic leaders, and the Imara Fellowship has been an instrumental platform in making this vision a reality.

At Siasa Place, we recognize the critical role that young people must play in shaping the future of our country. Our mission is to engage with communities, organise public forums, and drive accountability through civic participation. This fellowship has allowed us to introduce young leaders to these principles, offering them an invaluable opportunity to engage directly with county governments, local leaders, and community members.

The Imara Fellowship is a transformative experience that exposes fellows to the intricacies of governance and policy. Many of these young leaders begin their journey without a full understanding of how public service operates or how deep the layers of bureaucracy can be. As the fellows engage with government administrators, they learn how to navigate the system and see firsthand how community voices can influence policy decisions.

One of the most powerful impacts of the Imara Fellowship has been the realisation of leadership potential among the fellows. Many of them began with little confidence in their ability to mobilise communities or engage with leaders. Yet, through this program, they discovered their capacity for leadership, and some are now actively involved in community organising and even pursuing political roles.

However, as with any meaningful work, there are challenges like safety issues while conducting accountability work, inadequate funding and logistical challenges. While we have not received formal complaints, we remain committed to providing informal support when needed.

In terms of the fellowship selection process, we strive to maintain transparency and inclusivity by issuing open calls for applications. We have however encountered challenges with underrepresentation from certain project counties and low female participation. There are times we have had to reissue calls and actively encourage applications from underrepresented areas.

We have also adjusted our criteria to be more flexible, recognizing that experience and locality can sometimes be just as valuable as formal education. This is a learning process for us, and while it may not be perfect, we are continually improving our approach to ensure that we reach the communities that need accountability the most.

When many think of government, they often associate it solely with politics, unaware of the policy-making processes that shape our daily lives. Through this program, we have exposed young leaders to policy work and governance beyond just electoral politics, allowing them to see the broad landscape of public service.

Nerima Wako
Executive Director, Siasa Place

5.3. Gabriel Achayo, Country Coordinator, AYLF - Kenya Chapter

At AYLF, we believe in building strong foundations for leadership by focusing on personal development and community engagement. Imara has provided a critical platform for exposing young leaders to governance and policy spaces, areas that many of our members had yet to navigate. While we have always emphasised developing inner leadership qualities, Imara allowed us to expand this focus by offering structured exposure to real-world governance scenarios.

When Lone Felix introduced the idea of the Imara Fellowship to me, it was clear that this program would fill a significant gap in leadership development. By bridging the divide between university students, community leaders, and those without formal education, Imara fostered a unique space where all could engage meaningfully with governance issues.

Our role as partners has evolved, from alumni engagement to social media activation, ensuring that the voices of our fellows reach the right audiences. We have also contributed to the leadership training aspects of the program, emphasising personal development and value-based leadership, which remain central to our mission.

One of the most crucial aspects we've been involved in is the alumni transition process. While the fellowship provides a year-long intensive experience, there's a clear need to maintain momentum after graduation, and this is where AYLF has sought to make a meaningful contribution. However, this has not been without its challenges.

Initially, the alumni framework was not clearly defined, leading to teething problems in terms of structure and organisation. We realised that the Imara alumni, many of whom had only spent a year in the program, often felt disconnected or out of place when integrated with AYLF's existing alumni network, whose members typically have years of experience and a more formal educational background.

This disparity caused tension and a sense of exclusion for some alumni, particularly those who had not attended university. The challenge of balancing alumni from diverse backgrounds, some well-educated and seeking further opportunities, others more community-based and looking for practical ways to engage, became evident. Moreover, some political and personal dynamics within the alumni body created further complications, making it difficult to create a cohesive unit.

To address these issues, I believe there needs to be a more structured and inclusive approach to alumni management. One possible solution is to create a distinct identity for Imara alumni, allowing them to develop within their own framework while still maintaining connections to the broader AYLF network. This could involve establishing an independent alumni body with its own leadership, budget, and agenda, tailored to the unique needs of Imara graduates.

Furthermore, I suggest convening a meeting of alumni, either virtually or in person, to openly discuss the challenges they face. By engaging them in scenario mapping, we can present different models of alumni engagement and allow them to choose the structure that works best for their needs.

Whether it's an elective structure with a chair and secretary or a more collaborative, flat hierarchy where everyone has equal standing, the key is to foster ownership and trust among the alumni themselves. Only through this will we be able to overcome the existing divisions and create a sustainable and thriving alumni network.

Ultimately, the success of the alumni transition depends on trust and collaboration. If we can build that, I am confident that the Imara Fellowship alumni will continue to grow as leaders and contribute meaningfully to their communities and beyond.

Gabriel Achayo
Country Coordinator, AYLF - Kenya Chapter

For more information, please contact us on:

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